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DETAIL FROM SPINET BY PASPUINO QUERCI

## A GIFT OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS



ROSE ON VIRGINAL  
BY HANS RUCKERS

THROUGH the gift of Mr. Bernardus Boekelman, the Museum has recently come into the possession of four musical instruments of exceptional interest. The group consists of a vir-

ginal by Hans Ruckers the younger, an Italian spinet by Paspuino Querci of Florence, a miniature spinet, and a small *clavecin à maillets* or portable piano.

The most important of these is the Ruckers *vierkante clavisangel* or virginal, an oblong form of spinet. This has a plain case painted black, which rests on its original columned stand. The interior shows the buff and black block-printed paper decoration characteristic of the Ruckers' instruments, the lid bearing the motto painted in black: *Omnis spiritvs lavdet dominvm*. At the right of the soundboard, which is ornamented with floral scrolls in black, is the Hans Ruckers rose, an angel with spread wings playing upon a harp placed between the letters I. R. On the jack-rail is the inscription: *Johannes Rvkers fecit Antverpiae*, and below it, written in ink, appears the date, anno 1622. The recessed keyboard at the right has a compass of four octaves and a half, but the worn ivory naturals and ebony sharps which respond so reluctantly to the modern touch give but a faint idea of the sweet tone that once made these instruments famous.

The Ruckers family, consisting of Hans the elder and his two sons Hans (Johannes or Jean) and Andries, were celebrated instrument-makers of the early seventeenth century resident in Antwerp. Their clavichins had a widespread reputation in Germany, France, Spain, and England,<sup>1</sup> Hans the younger numbering among his patrons Charles I of England, who was fortunate enough to secure an instrument decorated by Rubens, for which he paid the munificent sum of £30. The Museum owns one other Ruckers virginal in the Crosby Brown Collection of Musical Instruments. This is by Christofel Ruckers, whose relation to the original family has never been fully determined. There are but five other instruments of his make, two undated and three dated between the years 1655-59. In all there are 94 examples<sup>2</sup> of the Ruckers workshop extant, only five of which remain in their native city, housed in the Steen Museum; the others are scattered among museums and private collections. The present specimen, a replica of which is described and illustrated by the late Mr. Hipkins in his well-known work on Musical Instruments,<sup>3</sup> has not as yet appeared in any published catalogue.

The popularity of these instruments is evidenced by the fact that they appear so frequently in Dutch paintings of the early seventeenth century. Perhaps the most noted instance of this is *The Music Lesson* of Vermeer, hung in Windsor Castle; in this a lady stands beside a virginal of which the present example might easily be the original

<sup>1</sup> Framery et Ginguené: *Encyclopedie Méthodique*, Paris, MDCCXCI. Article *Clavecin*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>2</sup> Grove's *Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, New York, 1910, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> Hipkins, A. J., *Musical Instruments*. Edinburgh, 1888, pl. XX.

were it not that the lid bears a different motto: *Musica letitiae comes medicina doloris*. Also in *The Music Lesson* of Metsu we find an instrument in every way closely resembling the work of the Ruckers; and again in Molenaar's *Young Lady Playing the Harpsichord*, of the Ryks Museum, is found a virginal of the same general type. In *The Music Master* of Jan Steen the artist records a harpsichord decorated with the characteristic Ruckers' paper, and Ter Borch, in his delightful musical composition entitled *The Concert*, shows us an interesting harpsichord used as an accompaniment to the 'cello. In thus depicting the home life of their people, the Dutch masters seemed to appreciate the artistic possibilities that lay in the graceful lines of a lute, a 'cello, or a clavecin. As already noted, they repeatedly made use of these in their genre painting, and the natural grouping of their well-posed models about these delightful old-time instruments, so peculiarly adapted to chamber music, produced at once an atmosphere of culture and refinement charming in its simplicity.

The beautiful little spinet by Paspuino Querci, with its inscription: *Paspuino Querci fiorentino fece 1615—La sua presenza e la sua abilita—Bona est or(a)tio cum ieiunio et elemosina*, has an outer case richly ornamented after the style of Raphael with a beautifully balanced design of arabesques on a white ground, the cover bearing a coat of arms. The instrument has a keyboard of ivory naturals with ebony sharps and a geometric rose in the

soundboard. Its compass is three octaves and a fourth.

The third instrument is of the same class as the two preceding, but built on simpler lines. This is a miniature spinet roughly made in the form of a book, probably dating from the early eighteenth century. Its compact form suggests the idea that it may have been used by some chorister-monk to enable him to keep the key, the tone being too feeble to carry farther than the ear of the performer. It has a compass of but one octave and a fifth and its keys are of wood. The soundboard has a geometric rose at the right and the strings pass over two curved bridges.

Equally interesting is the small portable piano or, more properly speaking, *clavecin à maillets*, illustrating an early step in the direction of hammer action. This action is most primitive, suggesting that published by Marius in 1735 and claimed by him to have been invented in 1717. The key is simply balanced as in the clavichord; it works in a slot, and in place of the small metal tangent, a little wooden hammer is fastened to a slip of wood hinged to the back of the key. This, when the key is depressed, rises and strikes the wire. The instrument has a compass of four octaves and a fifth; the keys are of walnut and sycamore and the case of cherry. The soundboard has a curved bridge and the wires are fastened to metal tuning pegs at the right. The lettering of the keys marks its provenance as German, early eighteenth century.

F. M.



DETAIL FROM SPINET BY PASPUINO QUERCI



SPINET, 1615  
BY PASPUINO QUERCI



VIRGINAL, 1622  
BY HANS RUCKERS THE YOUNGER